

IICKHO NESA/SO/P 6981 SPECIAL SEARCH

PAGE 0007

7 (FBXX) *09/01/84* *10:11*

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SUBJ

<> TAKE 1 OF 2 -- <><>KRASNAYA ZVEZDA<><>: REBELS KILL USSR AIRMAN IN DRA AIRFIELD
LO ATTACK

PM091406

<> MOSCOW <><>KRASNAYA ZVEZDA<><> IN RUSSIAN 8 JAN 84 SECOND EDITION P 2
(REPORT BY LIEUTENANT COLONEL V. SKRIZHALIN, KRASNAYA
ZVEZDA CORRESPONDENT, UNDER THE RUBRIC "ON AFGHAN SOIL":
"MOMENTS OF HEROISM"))

<>(TEXT) THE DISTRICT OF KHOKHST IN THE SOUTHEAST OF AFGHANISTAN JUTS INTO PAKISTANI TERRITORY LIKE A KIND OF PENINSULA. FOR A LONG TIME THIS REGION HAS BEEN CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE MOST INACCESSIBLE. THE (DZHADRAN) HIGH MOUNTAIN RIDGE AND THE WESTERN SPURS OF SPIN GHAR BLOCK IT OFF FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. AT THE SAME TIME, THE ABSENCE OF ANY SIGNIFICANT NATURAL BARRIERS ALONG THE BORDER WITH PAKISTAN RENDERS THE KHOKHST VALLEY A CONVENIENT CHANNEL FOR THE ENTRY OF COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY GANGS INTO THE DRA FROM THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRY. THE DUSHMANS HERE ARE EVEN SUPPLIED WITH ARTILLERY AND THE BANDITS ARE HELPED BY FOREIGN INSTRUCTORS TO USE IT.

THERE ARE FEW ROADS IN THIS DISTRICT. THE SHORTAGE OF ROADS AT TIMES MAKES IT PREFERABLE TO TRANSPORT MUCH NATIONAL ECONOMIC FREIGHT, AND ESPECIALLY THE MOST ESSENTIAL ITEMS, BY AIR. THE AIR GATEWAY TO KHOKHST IN NO WAY RESEMBLES A MODERN AIRPORT.

THE AIRFIELD THERE IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT IN AFGHANISTAN: A PACKED-EARTH RUNWAY, CLOSE PROXIMITY OF MOUNTAINS, MINIMUM AVAILABILITY OF RADAR EQUIPMENT. IN ADDITION, IT IS NOT UNUSUAL FOR AIRCRAFT AND HELICOPTERS TO COME UNDER FIRE FROM DUSHMANS. EACH FLIGHT MISSION THERE DEMANDS HIGH PROFESSIONAL SKILL AND COURAGE.

BUT HARSHSHIPS DO NOT STOP THE AFGHAN PILOTS AND TRANSPORT FLIERS

UNCLASSIFIED

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IICKHO NESA/SO/P 6981 SPECIAL SEARCH

PAGE

0008

FROM THE SOVIET LIMITED MILITARY CONTINGENT. THEY KNOW THAT THE PEOPLE OF KHOWST ARE WAITING FOR THE FREIGHT BROUGHT TO THEM BY THE AN-12'S AND AN-26'S. WHILE THE WEATHER PERMITS IT IS NECESSARY TO BUILD UP STOCKS OF FOOD, PETROLEUM PRODUCTS, AND WARM CLOTHING.

...TO START WITH, THE FLIGHT CARRIED OUT BY THE CREW OF THE AN-12 SOVIET TRANSPORT FROM KABUL TO KHOWST AND BACK WAS ALMOST IN NO WAY DIFFERENT FROM DOZENS OF PREVIOUS ONES. THEIR LANDING PUNCTILIOUSLY OBSERVED ALL THE STRICT LANDING CONDITIONS ESTABLISHED FOR KHOWST AIRFIELD. AS USUAL, THEY TAXIED TO THE STAND WHERE THE VEHICLES WERE WAITING FOR THEM. UNLOADING STARTED WITHOUT DELAY. CAPTAIN VIKTOR TSARALOV, THE AIRCRAFT COMMANDER, WAS IN CHARGE. TO START WITH, THEY UNLOADED THE MATTRESSES AND BLANKETS FROM THE TAIL-END OF THE AIRCRAFT. THEN CAME THE TURN OF THE GASOLINE. THE FIRST TANK, HELD BY STEEL ROPES BENEATH THE CRANE JIB, MOVED SLOWLY DOWN THE HOLD TOWARD THE TAIL GATE. A FEW SECONDS MORE, AND LIEUTENANT OF TECHNICAL SERVICES KONSTANTIN GEORGIADI, CREW TECHNICIAN FOR AVIATION LANDING EQUIPMENT, WOULD HAVE LET IT DOWN ONTO THE BACK OF A TRUCK. THE AFGHAN LOADING WORKERS WERE ALREADY STRETCHING THEIR HANDS TOWARD IT.

RIGHT AT THAT MOMENT THERE WAS AN UNEXPECTED EXPLOSION. A GREY-BLACK PLUME OF SMOKE AND DUST ROSE ABOUT 300 METERS AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT.

"DON'T STOP!", THE CREW COMMANDER ORDERED.

RIGHT THEN THE TRUCK'S BODY SETTLED UNDER THE TWO-TON WEIGHT OF THE TANK.

THE SECOND AND THIRD SHELLS FELL ONE NEXT TO THE OTHER, A MATTER OF METERS AWAY. SPLINTERS HAILED DOWN ON THE AIRCRAFT FUSELAGE. THE COMMANDER FELT A DULL PAIN IN HIS RIGHT SIDE AND JUST ABOUT MANAGED TO STAY ON HIS FEET. ENSIGN NIKOLAY PONOMARENKO, SENIOR FLIGHT RADIO OPERATOR, GASPED WITH PAIN.

"LET'S TAKE OFF!" CAME THE ORDER FROM CAPT TSARALOV, WHO RUSHED INTO THE COCKPIT THROUGH THE ESCAPE HATCH, CLUTCHING THE SPLINTER WOUND ON HIS SIDE WITH HIS LEFT HAND.

INFURIATED, OVERCOMING THE PAIN IN HIS FOOT WHICH HAD BEEN SHOT TO PIECES BY THE SPLINTER, ENSIGN NIKOLAY PONOMARENKO, SENIOR FLIGHT RADIO OPERATOR ON BOARD, HURRIED TOWARD LIEUTENANT ALEKSEY LOGINDV, ASSISTANT COMMANDER OF THE AIRCRAFT, WHO HAD FALLEN BENEATH IT. THE NAVIGATOR, SENIOR LIEUTENANT ALEKSANDR STRETOVICH, AND THE SENIOR FLIGHT ENGINEER, SENIOR LIEUTENANT OF TECHNICAL SERVICES LEV KALYAGIN, GOT THERE BEFORE HIM. THEY PICKED UP THEIR COMRADE'S LISTLESS BODY....

AS IT BECAME CLEAR LATER, CAPT TSARALOV HAD TAKEN THE ONLY CORRECT DECISION UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES. THEY COULD NOT HAVE REMAINED AT THE AIRPORT FOR A MOMENT LONGER. IF NOTH THE FOURTH, THEN THE FIFTH, SEVENTH, OR TENTH SHELL FIRED BY THE DUSHMANS WOULD HAVE HIT THE AIRCRAFT WITH THE GASOLINE TANKS IN ITS HOLD. THE AIRCRAFT COULD BE SAVED ONLY BY GETTING OUT OF THEIRE. BUT THE COMMANDER WAS WOUNDED. HE COULD NOT MOVE HIS RIGHT HAND. THE ASSISTANT COMMANDER WAS LYING MOTIONLESS. AND YET THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY OUT. ALL HOPES WERE RESTING WITH HIM, THE COMMANDING OFFICER.

IT WAS A MATTER OF SECONES. ALL CREW MEMBERS WHO WERE STILL ON

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IIICKHO NESA/SO/P 6981 SPECIAL SEARCH

PAGE 0009

THEIR FEET URGENTLY (THE FIRE WAS STILL CONTINUING) PREPARED THE AIRCRAFT FOR TAKE-OFF.

LT A. LOGINOV'S HEART WAS BEATING ITS LAST. THE RADIO OPERATOR WAS STRUGGLING TO RETAIN CONSCIOUSNESS. A SOVIET OFFICER, WHO HAD JUMPED INTO THE AIRCRAFT WITH THE CREW AND REMAINS, UNFORTUNATELY, UNKNOWN, WAS APPLYING A TOURNIQUET ON THE OPERATOR'S LEG, WHICH WAS SPURTING BLOOD, WITH HIS PANTS BELT. THIS OFFICER WAS ON HIS WAY TO KABUL. NOW IT IS HARD TO SAY WHAT MADE HIM JUMP INTO THE AIRCRAFT INSTEAD OF THE SHELTER, WHERE HE COULD HAVE WAITED OUT THE SHELLING AND FLOWN TO THE DRA CAPITAL UNDER CALMER CONDITIONS ON ANOTHER FLIGHT. BUT HE FLEW WITH THE CREW WHICH HAD SUFFERED FIVE CASUALTIES OUT OF A TOTAL OF EIGHT MEMBERS. HE FLEW WITH THOSE WHO MIGHT NEED HIS HELP. AND HE DID GIVE HIS HELP, BOTH IN THE AIRCRAFT AND LATER, AFTER LANDING IN KABUL, HELPING TO SEND THE INJURED TO HOSPITAL. AND AFTERWARDS, UNNOTICED BY ANYONE, UNKNOWN, HE MADE HIS WAY FROM THE AIRPORT TO THE CITY WHERE HIS BUSINESS AWAITED HIM.

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PAGE 0010

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<> REF PM091406 MOSCOW <><> Krasnaya Zvezda <><> RUSSIAN 8 JAN // BUSINESS AWAITED HIM.

<> TAKE 2 OF 2 -- <><> Krasnaya Zvezda <><> REBELS KILL USSR AIRMAN IN DRA AIRFIELD ATTACK

PM091407

((TEXT)) AT TAKE-OFF THE COMMANDER DEMANDED FROM HIS AIRCRAFT EVERYTHING OF WHICH IT WAS CAPABLE. AND IT DID NOT LET HIM DOWN, DESPITE THE DAMAGE IT HAD SUFFERED. AT KABUL AIRPORT THEY DISCOVERED ABOUT 150 HOLES IN THE WINGS AND THE FUSELAGE, THE COCKPIT HAD BECOME DECOMRESSED, AND THE DRAG LINK FROM THE RIGHT-HAND CONTROL STICK HAD BEEN DAMAGED. ONE OF THE SPLINTERS HAD PUNCTURED A GASOLINE TANK AND THE GASOLINE HAD RUN INTO THE HOLD. OXYGEN HAD BEEN "LEAKING" FROM THE PUNCTURED OXYGEN SYSTEM. THE MIXTURE OF OXYGEN AND GASOLINE FUMES COULD HAVE EXPLODED AT ANY MOMENT.

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES (ACCORDING TO OBLIGATORY RULES) AN AIRCRAFT DOES NOT START MOVING UNTIL THE CREW HAVE STARTED ALL FOUR ENGINES AND TESTED ALL THEIR FUNCTIONS. THIS TIME, HOWEVER, NO SOONER HAD THE FIRST ENGINE PICKED UP REVOLUTIONS THAN TSARALOV STARTED ROLLING TOWARD THE TAKE-OFF POSITION, MOVING AWAY FROM THE FIRE. DURING TAXIING SENIOR LT OF TECHNICAL SERVICES L. KALYAGIN STARTED TWO MORE ENGINES. THE LAST ONE PICKED UP THE NECESSARY REVOLUTIONS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TAKE-OFF RUN. WITH THE TAIL END UNLOADED, THE AIRCRAFT ACQUIRED A FORWARD CENTER OF GRAVITY. THIS MADE IT DIFFICULT TO LIFT OFF THE FORWARD SECTION OF THE BODY. CONTROLLING AN AIRCRAFT WITH A FORWARD CENTER OF GRAVITY DEMANDED FROM THE PILOT MUCH GREATER PHYSICAL EFFORTS ON THE CONTROL STICK THAN USUAL. AND TSARALOV WAS WORKING WITH ONLY HIS LEFT HAND. THE SLIGHTEST MOVEMENT WITH THE RIGHT CAUSED HIM UNBEARABLE PAIN.

UNCLASSIFIED

IICKHO NESA/SO/P 6981 SPECIAL SEARCH

PAGE

0011

NOW TSARALOV HIMSELF CANNOT EXPLAIN IN DETAIL HOW HE AND THE SENIOR FLIGHT ENGINEER MANAGED TO MANIPULATE THE FLAPS, THE CONTROL STICK, AND THE ENGINE CONTROL LEVERS AND TO LIFT THE CRAFT, WHOSE NOSE WAS LEANING DOWN TOWARD THE GROUND, AT THE VERY END OF THE TAKE-OFF STRIP. THE AIRCRAFT BANKED SHARPLY, AVOIDING THE MOUNTAINS, REACHED THE NECESSARY HEIGHT ABOVE THE AIRFIELD, AND SET COURSE FOR KABUL.

SENIOR RADIO OPERATOR N. PONOMARENKO, WEAKENED BY THE LOSS OF BLOOD, WAS UNABLE TO SWITCH ON THE ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT WHEN THE ENGINES STARTED. HE WAS REPLACED BY LT OF TECHNICAL SERVICES K. GEORGIADI, CREW TECHNICIAN FOR AVIATION LANDING EQUIPMENT, WHO ALSO HAD A SPLINTER IN HIS LEG. GEORGIADI'S POST WAS TAKEN BY THE SENIOR AIRCRAFT GUNNER, ENSIGN NIKOLAY KAROLIN AND THE AIRCRAFT MECHANIC, PRIVATE BEKHTIYAR OTERBAYEV, WHO CONSIDERED HIS OWN WOUND TO BE A MERE SCRATCH. THERE THEY WERE -- WELL-COORDINATED AND INTERCHANGEABLE CREW MEMBERS, CAPABLE OF ACTING WITH REDUCED NUMBERS!

BEFORE TAKEOFF AND IN THE AIR EACH CREW MEMBER WHO WAS ABLE TO FUNCTION WORKED FOR TWO. KARELIN AND OTARBAYEV MANAGED AT THE START OF THE TAKEOFF RUN TO VERY QUICKLY SECURE THE GASOLINE TANKS FROM WHICH THE SECURING WEBBING HAD BEEN REMOVED DURING THE UNLOADING OPERATIONS. THIS PREVENTED A SHIFT OF THE FREIGHT DURING THE RUN AND, OF COURSE, AN UNEXPECTED SHIFT IN THE TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT'S CENTER OF GRAVITY....

THE AIRCRAFT FLEW TO KABUL AIRPORT WITHOUT BEING IN CONTACT WITH THE GROUND. THE MAIN RADIO WAS SILENT: PONOMARENKO WAS UNABLE TO OPERATE IT. ONLY ON THE APPROACH TO KABUL AIRPORT, WHEN DISTANCE AND CONDITIONS ENABLED CAPT TSARALOV TO ESTABLISH CONTACT ON HIS UHF RADIO, WAS THE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT GIVEN ORDERS TO PREPARE TO RECEIVE THE DAMAGED AIRCRAFT....

AFTERWARDS THE COMMANDER SPOKE ABOUT HIS LANDING WITH HIS CUSTOMARY BREVITY:

"WE MADE A DIRECT APPROACH TO KABUL. WE APPROACHED THE RUNWAY FROM A DISTANCE FOUR TIMES SHORTER THAN NORMAL.... AND LANDED WITH A SHARP LEFT TURN."

THIS IS HOW OFFICER YU. KRAVCHENKO, AN EXPERIENCED TRANSPORT PILOT, ASSESSES THE FLIGHT:

"I PAY TRIBUTE TO THE CREW'S COURAGE. BUT WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY THE AIRCRAFT COMMANDER IS, WITHOUT ANY EXAGGERATION, A REAL COMET FEAT. HE TOOK A DECISION WHICH CAN BE SAID TO HAVE BEEN FEASIBLE ONLY NOW, WHEN THE DEED HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED. BUT ANY OTHER DECISION WOULD HAVE RESULTED IN A TRAGIC END."

YES, A LOFTY FEAT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED BY COMMUNIST CAPT V. TSARALOV AND HIS CREW, WORTHILY EXECUTING THEIR INTERNATIONAL DUTY. A FEAT FOR THE SAKE OF THE AFGHANS' PEACEFUL AND HAPPY LIFE.

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